Historic, Archive Document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

LIBRARY
RECEIVED
☆ APR 9 1937 ☆
U. S. Department of Agriculture

HOUSEHOLD CALENDAR

Food Fallacies Get an Airing

A dialogue between Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, and Mr. Morse Salisbury, Radio Service, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC stations, Thursday, April 1, 1937.

- - - - -

MR. SALISBURY: Now for another of Ruth Van Deman's weekly Household Calendar talks. And I warn you it may be full of April fool jokes.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Why, Morse, do you imply that I'm a practical joker?

MR. SALISBURY: You're practical, I know that. And I didn't quite like the sound of that laugh you gave when I told you the other day you were scheduled for seven minutes on April first.

MISS VAN DEMAN: You laughed too. And who doesn't on April first.

MR. SALISBURY: Just an old American custom, I guess.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Older than America - at least the United States of America. Even the wise men who wrote the dictionary haven't got to the bottom of April Fool's Day. "Origin of name and practice unknown", the dictionary says. And it might say the same about some of our household supersititions and funny ideas about food.

MR. SALISBURY: Phoney, did you say?

MISS VAN DEMAN: That's what I meant.

MR. SALISBURY: Now I get the meaning of that laugh. You were planning to call April fool on some of these old bogeys.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Well, don't you think they've fooled us about long enough. The other day after you called me I began to jot down some of the most persistent ones. And you know how it is when you begin looking for examples to illustrate a point. They pop at you from every paper and magazine you pick up.

For instance yesterday when the April number of the Journal of Home Economics came along, the first thing I opened to was an article about milk superstitions, written by Mr. Frandsen of the Massachusetts Agricultural Experiment Station.

MR. SALISBURY: Does he knock that old one about not eating fish and milk at the same meal?

MISS VAN DEMAN: Oh, yes. That's almost a classic. Of course it stems back to the days before we had refrigerators and other adequate means of

- over -

keeping fish from spoiling. And bad fish is very, very bad for the digestive system of most humans, no doubt about that. It can cause most painful and serious cases of food poisoning. And under such circumstances milk may aggravate the trouble because it's a protein food, and some of the troublesome bacteria thrive on proteins. But if the fish is in perfectly good condition to eat and if the milk likewise is pure and wholesome, there's no reason at all why they both can't be eaten at the same meal.

But I know how strongly people feel about this. I had a good example of it myself not long ago. I was having lunch in a cafeteria after one of these broadcasts, and I noticed the woman across the table looking at me very hard. I had just finished eating some fish, broiled shad I think it was, and was about to start my dessert of lemon milk sherbet. Finally she spoke. She said she just couldn't help warning me that I shouldn't eat fish and milk at the same meal. I expect I shocked her by my cheerful answer and my disregard of her advice, though I thanked her for her interest.

MR. SALISBURY: Too bad you didn't take her name and call her up the next day, just to let her know you were alive and well.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Yes, that might have made her feel happier.

MR. SALISBURY: I'm surprised that the lady didn't warn you also about the combination of milk and lemon juice in the sherbet.

MISS VAN DEMAN: She probably overlooked that in her anxiety about the milk and the fish. But it's another old bogey that rises up to scare us. Because acid curdles milk, people think that makes it indigestible. They seem to forget that the gastric juices in the stomach curdle milk as the first step toward digestion.

MR. SALISBURY: Make it into cottage cheese.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Yes, something like that. And when you eat an acid food along with the milk a finer curd is formed in the stomach, and the milk digests more quickly.

MR. SALISBURY: Then a slice of cherry pie with a big scoop of ice cream on top of it, wouldn't cause a dietitian to lift an eyebrow?

MISS VAN DEMAN: Not because of the combination of milk and acid in the cherries. I wouldn't say, Morse, that she might not lift an eyebrow for other reasons - total calories maybe.

MR. SALISBURY: Ahem - guess I better change the subject. What about this theory of acid foods making the system acid.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Now you've picked out one of the real jokers. Some of our sourest tasting fruits and vegetables, such as lemons and grapefruit, and tomatoes, have an alkaline reaction when finally digested in the body. The acid in them is burned up by the body, leaving an alkaline end product, just the opposite of what your sense of taste would lead you to believe.

MR. SALISBURY: Then do sweet things change to acid in the body?

MISS VAN DEMAN: Pure sugars and starches have a neutral reaction. But the proteins, like meat and eggs, have decidedly acid end products, and bread and cereals show a mild acidity. The fruits and vegetables are the chief alkaline or base-forming foods.

MR. SALISBURY: What about this modern notion of eating only starches at one meal and proteins at another. The dissociate diet, I believe they call it.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Nothing to it as far as the nutritionists and careful scientific investigators can find. The success stories you hear about it probably come from eating a better diet as a whole - more of the protective foods such as milk and eggs and fresh vegetables and fruits, and not over-eating on the fats and rich things that tax even the huskiest digestive system.

MR. SALISBURY: Then it's a scientifically demonstrated fact that our digestive system is equipped to handle starch and protein and different food substances at the same time, provided we don't make the load too heavy.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Yes. Scientifically demonstrated many times and practically proved by millions of individuals every day.

MR. SALISBURY: Tell me this, Ruth. What do your nutrition people say about spinach nowadays?

MISS VAN DEMAN: You mean does spinach deserve the debunking it's got recently?

MR. SALISBURY: Yes. I'd really like to know about that.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Well, they think the debunking has gone a little too far. They've got their fingers crossed until more evidence is in. Maybe spinach isn't such a fine source of calcium and iron as we used to think, but they aren't convinced that it's worthless by any means.

A few years ago I was one of seven subjects in an experiment to test the utilization of calcium in spinach. We lived on a diet with spinach as the main source of calcium for a week. And with milk for another week. On the whole the calcium in the spinach wasn't as well retained by the body as the calcium from the milk. But it was on the plus side with six out of the seven of us on the experiment.

MR. SALISBURY: Then you aren't ready to cut spinach off the menu.

MISS VAN DEMAN: By no means. These new findings about spinach really go to prove what we've said all along. It's best to eat a variety of leafy green vegetables and every other kind of food as regularly as you can. Some will give you one thing, some another. And a few years from now we'll probably know about other food substances that we haven't even guessed at yet.

MR. SALISBURY: Then your philosophy is: Don't limit the diet to just a few foods and depend on them to give everything the body needs to keep it fit.

MISS VAN DEMAN: That is the sum and substance of the well-balanced diet as nutritionists have figured it out.

MR. SALISBURY: As I remember it, Doctor Stiebeling incorporated that idea together with cost in her bulletin on "Diets to fit the family income."

MISS VAN DEMAN: That's right.

MR. SALISBURY: Is that still on the free list?

MISS VAN DEMAN: Yes, I think "Diets to fit the family income" is still on the free list.

MR. SALISBURY: That being the case, anyone who writes to the Department of Agriculture here in Washington for "Diets to fit the family income" may have a copy. And thank you, Ruth, for scotching some of these false ideas about foods. We'll be looking for you again next Thursday.